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SUBJECT: JORDAN: DEMOCRATIC REFORM STRATEGY UPDATE

REF: A. REF A: 05 AMMAN 4125
[1](#)B. REF B: AMMAN 1183
[1](#)C. REF C: AMMAN 2985
[1](#)D. REF D: AMMAN 3959

Classified By: Classified by Political Counselor David Greene
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Since the development of our initial democratic reform strategy for Jordan (REF A), the GOJ has made progress on a wide variety of the goals set out. Post made substantial contributions to democratic reforms in Jordan through focused, well-funded programming efforts, advocacy within the GOJ and without, as well as a growing capacity in the NGO and press sectors. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to be done. While a new political party law was passed in early 2007, its impact on the country's political makeup and culture remains uncertain. The independent press was bolstered by a new media law, but self-censorship and official intimidation persist behind opaque loopholes in the legal status of journalists. Jordan's legal reforms continue to enhance efficiency, but inconsistent application and public confidence remain issues to be addressed. The National Agenda foresees a responsive, accountable public sector, but changing bureaucratic culture will take time. Post's democratic reform strategy remains focused on the issues identified two years ago, with some modifications that reflect completed tasks. Post continues to count on Washington's support for guidance, program implementation, and funding. End Summary.

Political Parties and Election Reforms

Where We Are Now

[1](#)2. (SBU) In our initial democratic reform strategy (REF A), Post stated as a desired outcome the "passage of a new elections and political parties law that will encourage a more representative parliament and promote the development of political parties." In terms of parliamentary elections, the government has decided to stick with the current election law for the foreseeable future (see below for a discussion of the revised municipal elections law). A political parties law was passed in March 2007, but as it will not come into effect until after the scheduled November 2007 parliamentary elections, its impact is still uncertain.

[1](#)3. (C) In terms of broadening the representative nature of the parliament, the new political parties law will probably have little to no effect on the number of Jordanians of Palestinian origin in parliament. The under-representation of these citizens (estimated by some at around sixty percent of Jordan's population) continues to be an area for concern.

In the current lower house of parliament, only seventeen out of 110 MPs are of Palestinian origin. This situation is unlikely to change after the November elections. A related matter concerns the boundaries of political districts, which currently underrepresent Jordanians of Palestinian origin. The new political parties law does nothing to change the current gerrymandered system. All of this may be intentional. Interior Minister Id al-Fayiz said in an interview that the political parties law was designed to foster parties with "programs originating from the homeland, not abroad", an East Banker code word for the perception of dual allegiance that Jordanians of Palestinian origin are accused of possessing. Note: Jordan's earlier experiences with the region's political movements of the 1950s and 1960s - including Nasserism, Ba'athism, and the PLO's near-takeover of Jordan in 1970 - are examples of "imported" ideologies used by regional actors to destabilize Hashemite rule in Jordan. End Note.

¶4. (SBU) The new law promises to change the development of Jordan's political party system - what remains to be seen is what will emerge from that change. The shock to the system comes in the form of an increase in the minimum founding membership of political parties from fifty to 500 (REF B). Note: This clause applies retroactively, meaning that all current political parties in Jordan have to meet that standard by Spring 2008. End Note. The law also requires that these 500 founding members come from at least five of Jordan's twelve governorates. This will likely result in either the closure or the consolidation of a number of Jordan's fractured and marginal political parties, which function more as Amman-based discussion groups or one-man advancement vehicles, and less as coherent, national political entities. This is recognized by the current parties, who have declared the law to be a "death warrant for the country's political life". Of the current lineup of political parties, only the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and perhaps Chamber of Deputies Speaker Abdel Hadi al-Majali's new National Partisan Movement are expected to gather the requisite new "founding members" to be considered political parties under the new system. Whether the new regulations will have the desired effect of producing an organized moderate political entity or entities that can challenge the IAF has yet to be seen. Any such outcome would have to wait until well into 2008 (after the scheduled November 2007 parliamentary elections), when the new law is set to come into effect.

¶5. (SBU) In July of 2007, Jordanians went to the polls in municipal elections that, while marred by allegations of government intervention, were a substantial step forward on the democratization front. The elections were held under a revised statute that allowed for direct election (rather than appointment) of most mayors, quota seats for women on municipal councils, and a lowering of the voting age from nineteen to eighteen (REF C). The elections generated a relatively high level of voter interest and turnout, and were welcomed by many as a step in the right direction. Some of the goodwill that was produced by the elections, however, may have evaporated in the wake of accusations of government interference in the proceedings. Beyond the transparency issue, there is the lingering question of half-measures where democracy is concerned: the mayor of Amman, half of Amman's city council, and the entire city government of Aqaba are still appointed by the government.

How We Got There

¶6. (SBU) USAID and MEPI funded projects continue to be at the forefront of Jordan's political transformation. Through USAID funding, NDI and IRI programs are strengthening the outreach potential of Jordan's political parties and promoting broad-based and representative political competition. These two grantees offered programs that reached literally thousands of Jordanian political party activists. Their workshops focus on strategic planning, message promotion, and membership development, and are already producing results. In the 2007 elections, eleven

participants in NDI and IRI programs from six political parties were elected to municipal councils and mayoralities.

Revised Goals

17. (SBU) While the first part of our desired outcome (the passage of a political parties law) has come to pass, the realization of the second part (a more representative parliament and developed political parties) is still in the middle distance at best. It will take time to see whether the systemic changes will result in broader representation and coherent political groupings. Looking to the future, Post will continue to push for a more representative parliament and the development of issue-based political parties as the vehicles for political expression. In addition, we will encourage greater participation in the political process by NGOs and other civil society organizations. We see this as helping to broaden the scope of political debate and encouraging issue-based activism rather than nebulous theorizing in the political arena. Encouraging a more independent and active media (see below) will also help us to achieve these goals.

2008 Targets:

-- Political Parties Law goes into effect. As old political parties fade, GOJ works to create the environment for new, larger scale, coherent, nationally focused political parties.

-- GOJ allows deeper, more critical media coverage of political developments, and more coverage of policy-specific issues in line with new political alignments.

-- Through USG support, Jordanian civil society organizations develop a more practical, issue-based focus to their operations, leading to changes in legislative processes.

-- Women in parliament begin to address the issues specific to women in an organized way, and are supported by their counterparts in NGOs.

-- The GOJ and civil society begin to lay the foundations for an improved monitoring environment for the 2011 elections.

-- The GOJ makes further changes to the municipal elections law that would allow all mayors and city council seats in Jordan to be filled via elections.

Press Freedom and Independence

Where We Are Now

18. (C) Our goal of a freer and more independent press remains as stated in our previous democratic reform strategy. Jordan is making incremental progress towards that goal, but remains a country in which the media sector still lacks capacity and is hemmed in by government and societal restrictions. A new press law was passed that was a mixed bag for media freedom and independence. On the plus side, it removed the explicit threat of imprisonment for journalists who crossed legally delineated red lines. Unfortunately, the positive expression of a protected public space for journalists remains an ideal. The law also remains opaque on the legal recourse of journalists who are prosecuted obliquely under non-media related statutes. And while the threat of imprisonment for journalists on the basis of their reporting was removed, the fines for these same offenses were substantially increased. In the end, these onerous fines may prove to be as large a damper on press expression as the threat of a prison term.

19. (SBU) The number of voices in Jordan's press is increasing, often with U.S. help. The number of new radio stations in particular is on the rise, although they are mainly dedicated to local news rather than national content. Jordan's on-again-off-again regulatory dance with independent TV station ATV (REF C) is an indicator of the limiting effect

that Jordanian government actions often have on the work of the media.

How We Got There

¶10. (SBU) Through USAID and Public Affairs programming, Post remains active in the promotion of democratic values in the media sector. International Visitor grants were given to several journalists, and Post has also arranged programs with the Foreign Press Center and American NGOs that deal with press freedom. IREX, through a USAID grant, gave journalists and journalism students practical, hands-on training through workshops on a variety of themes related to media freedom. News rooms also received in-house training from senior American journalists and academics in the practicalities of reporting in specific areas such as elections, terrorism, and poverty.

Revised Goals

¶11. (SBU) The goal of a press free from intimidation may be added to our previously stated target of a more independent press. This takes into account not only the experience of ATV, but also print and other broadcast journalists who rarely feel able to venture outside of the straight jacket of their perceptions of what is and is not acceptable. The creation of a level playing field for independent media vis-a-vis their government-sponsored or government owned counterparts is also a goal worth adding.

2008 Targets:

-- The Jordanian press begins a period of re-assessment of where the red lines in Jordanian society and government really are by starting a formal or informal dialogue based on the National Agenda.

-- In the post-election period, the Jordanian press covers a wide variety of political movements and issues, focusing mainly on the impact those forces will have on the daily life of the people.

-- ATV begins broadcasting, and its regulatory troubles are dealt with in a way that encourages future entrants into the private Jordanian broadcast media.

-- The Jordanian media adds a multitude of non-government voices in print, radio, television, and the internet.

Judicial Sector Reform

Where We Are Now

¶12. (SBU) Jordan is well on the way to achieving the long-term outcome of an open and transparent judicial system with improved public confidence in the courts to effectively resolve disputes. There is significant, positive political will on the part of the government. Even so, the goal (especially the element involving public attitudes) was always recognized as one with a longer horizon, and it remains so even as substantial progress is being made. The technical and bureaucratic barriers to change in Jordan's legal system remain high. Court cases are still being dealt with through a manual (rather than electronic) caseload management system in many places outside of Amman. The courts remain backlogged with cases, and the case load is increasing further. More judges and lawyers need to be trained in specific pieces of the law than ever before. In all of this, the bureaucracy of Jordan's judicial system remains slow to change.

How We Got There

¶13. (SBU) Despite the difficulties noted above, significant progress is being made and the political will to change is there. Jordan's 2006 National Agenda recognizes the work to be done, in specific terms, and American programs are at the

forefront of fulfilling those goals. USAID's MASAQ rule of law project has the lead role in pursuing capacity-building opportunities in the Jordanian judicial sector. Through USAID funding, 277 training opportunities were offered in the past year for judges, with over 1,600 participating, often in multiple sessions. Every female judge in Jordan has participated in one or more of these programs. Judicial ethics is a particular focus of ABA programming, with the result that Jordan's Code of Judicial Ethics was revised to strengthen enforcement measures.

¶14. (SBU) Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is another primary focus of judicial assistance programming. Through workshops and other assistance, Jordan's first ADR "court" opened its doors in 2006, with a planned expansion to five branches in the next year. Smaller grants to Jordanian civil society groups included funding for education programs for rural communities which explained their rights and modes of petition under the legal system, mediation training for youth, programs on the legal framework of marriage, and training sessions on labor laws.

Revised Goals

¶15. (SBU) Through USAID and other programs, as well as through its direct contact with Jordan's judicial sector, Post will continue to work on this key element of our democratic reform strategy. These efforts will seek to consolidate and institutionalize the gains of the past two years while deepening their effects and spurring calls for further measures to make Jordan's judicial system more transparent, accessible, and fair. Bringing these gains to the people of Jordan, and helping the public to recognize the quality and quantity of the recent changes, will also be a part of our long term efforts on this subject.

2008 Targets:

-- 100% of Jordan's courts use an automated case management system.

-- The ADR system is used more and more to reduce the judicial system's caseload.

-- In coordination with Jordan's National Agenda, internal review of judicial reform increases public confidence by reducing the level of corruption.

Public Sector Reform

Where We Are Now

¶16. (SBU) Our initial goal of an efficient, responsive, and accountable public sector is difficult to measure in terms of tangible outcomes, but in the end Post sees this as an important long-term goal. Jordan's ranking in the most recent Transparency International corruption index slipped considerably. This may be due both to stalled progress in Jordan's own anti-corruption efforts and the relative improvement of other countries. In spite of this setback, it is likely a marginal change on the road of general improvement. Note: Transparency International's country director has resigned in protest, saying that the rankings did not reflect what he saw as Jordan's improvement in the corruption arena. End Note. Civil society is in the first stages of a government monitoring effort, but that effort is hampered by self-censorship, as well as perceived (and actual) limitations on concrete action that may result from civil society findings.

¶17. (U) Jordan's National Agenda is peppered with performance indicators of efficiency and a greater focus on customer service. In many cases, privatization is seen as the answer to the service woes of government-owned enterprises. The establishment of independent regulatory commissions and inspector general offices throughout the government is envisioned by the Agenda's authors as a way to

improve the provision of services to the public. While this remains a vision document, and not something that the government has accepted part and parcel, it is a key indicator of the broadly recognized changes that are seen as needed in the Jordanian public sector.

How We Got There

¶18. (SBU) Post's efforts toward public sector reform took many forms in the past two years. Through USAID's MASAQ rule of law project, NGOs and journalists were provided with training opportunities related to monitoring and advocacy - two key skills that will improve the support structure for demanding specific changes in the way Jordan's government does business. USG funded efforts in the judicial sector (see above) will also have a lasting effect on the quality of service delivered by that part of Jordan's government. USAID also helped to establish the King Abdullah Prize, an award given to the government department that shows the most progress in transforming its procedures for the public good. The prize is awarded based on lengthy, detailed nominations from government workers. Looking towards an MCC compact, USAID is also funding managerial and infrastructure improvements in nine municipalities, as well as modernization in the customs service.

Revised Goals

¶19. (SBU) In the future, Post will continue to work on this goal through our programmatic efforts and day-to-day contacts with Jordanian officials. In the end, reforms in Jordan's bureaucracy and government system will only work if the culture of government service is changed. That is something that we can influence, but not spur directly. It is also a change that takes time, as the expectations of different generations meet and shape each other. Our role in this part of Jordan's democratization process is to offer pertinent models and provide the government with the capacity and resources necessary to achieve its goals.

2008 Targets:

- In line with Jordan's National Agenda, the GOJ sets up Inspector General offices in each ministry, and publicizes their findings.
- Jordan's civil society begins to build the capacity of its governmental monitoring projects.
- Jordan improves its ranking in the Transparency International corruption rankings.
- The new Anti-Corruption Commission (formed in early 2007), begins to successfully prosecute cases.

Washington Support

¶20. (C) In terms of Washington's role in achieving our democracy promotion goals, we have two requests that directly relate to our ability to support democratic reforms in Jordan:

- Programmatic support that will allow for capacity building and broader perspectives both from the government and from civil society.

The USG brings to the table a set of resources and experience in using those resources around the world. As Jordan's democratic development matures, our programming must mature as well. We foresee a time in the not too distant future when Jordan will graduate from the basic level of democracy-building efforts. As this happens, Jordan's government and civil society will increasingly require a more complex and intricate level of training and expertise. We should be prepared to move to this next level, in order to support the deepening of the changes that Jordan has in many cases already put in motion.

- The funding necessary to maintain or expand our

programmatic efforts.

Post has enjoyed generous long term funding from MEPI, USAID, and other funding sources to help with capacity building efforts in the area of democracy promotion. We look forward to reporting on the results of this funding, as well as working with Washington to secure further resources that will help us maintain existing programs while tailoring our programs to the changing needs of Jordan. As noted above, a maturing democracy will require a higher level of funding and the support necessary to administer that funding in a targeted way.

Post looks forward to working with its Washington colleagues in the future implementation of this strategy.

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